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BORDER CAVALRY

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4 February 1966

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ARMY CONCEPT TEAM IN VIETNAM
APO San Francisco 96243

ACTIV-AAD

4 February 1966

SUBJECT: Border Cavalry

THRU: Director
Joint Research and Test Activity
APO US Forces 96309

TO: Commanding General
United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam
APO US Forces 96243

1. During a visit to the 1/9 Cavalry Squadron at Pleiku in December 1965, General Westmoreland expressed interest in a wider application of the techniques of border screening then being performed by that unit.

2. Attached as inclosure 1 is an informal report, titled "Border Cavalry," which addresses the subject.

Hugh E. Quigley
HUGH E. QUIGLEY
Colonel, Armor
Chief

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INTERVALS
DECLASSIFIED ON 31 DECEMBER 1978

BORDER CAVALRY (U)

1. (U) REFERENCES

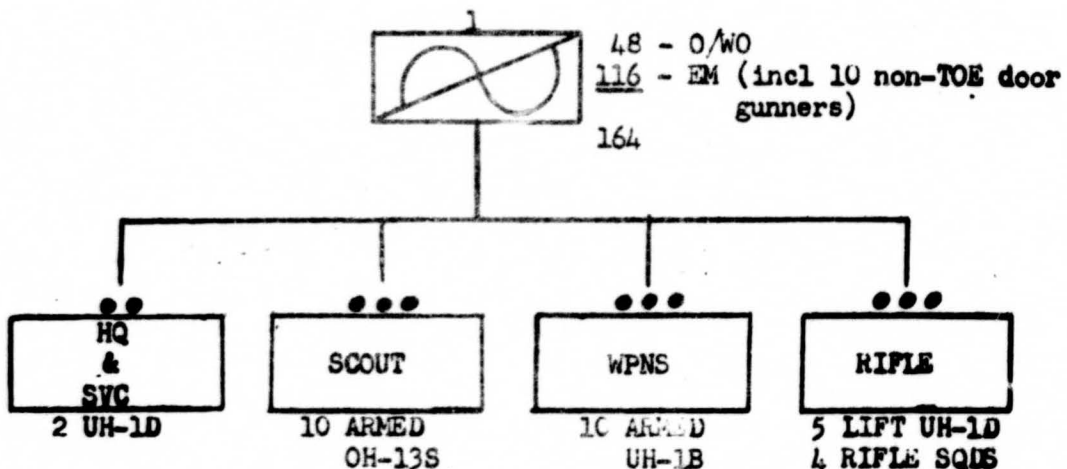
- a. Maps: USAF Pilotage Charts, Cambodia-Vietnam, 1:500,000
- b. TOE 17-95, 96, 97, 98

2. (C) PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to present the results of a survey to determine how many US air cavalry troops, working in conjunction with USSF/CIDG or other ARVN elements, it would take to screen the western border of SVN from Ha Tien (VS 4447) on the south to the I-II Corps boundary on the north.

3. (C) CAVALRY ORGANIZATION

a. As presently organized, a US air cavalry troop looks like this:



Incl 1

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b. There are three air cavalry troops and one ground cavalry troop, together with a H&H troop, in the current air cavalry squadron. Total squadron strength, including locally authorized door gunners, is 820 personnel, of whom 174 are officers/warrant officers. Squadron helicopters total 88. Wheel vehicles total 115.

4. (C) BACKGROUND

The following information is based on combat experience of the 1/9 Cavalry Squadron, 1st Cavalry Division:

- a) Generally speaking, 80% of assigned helicopters in a troop are mission-ready at the start of a combat operation following a maintenance standown, and the remaining 20% are down for work or awaiting parts.
- b) After about the fifth day of an extended combat operation, the mission-ready rate decreases toward 60% of helicopters and crews assigned. This mission-ready rate of between 60% and 70% can be maintained almost indefinitely provided replacement personnel and helicopters are assigned to fill combat losses.
- c) Stated otherwise, for sustained operations an air cavalry troop has the following combat element available daily:
 - 1) One troop command/control team of 2 UH-1B/UH-1D helicopters
 - 2) Three scout teams of 2 armed OH-13S helicopters each
 - 3) Three weapons teams of 2 armed UH-1B helicopters each
 - 4) Four light rifle squads of 7 men each, mounted in 4 UH-1D lift helicopters.
- d) Crews and machines can fly an average of 5 hours per day.
- e) The area which a troop combat element can screen effectively is almost purely a function of terrain and density of enemy forces. In open terrain, such as that between Pleiku and the western slopes of the Mang Yang Pass, a screening area of 1,500 square kilometers is altogether realistic. In close terrain such as that along the Cambodian border between Dak Pek (YB 9359) and Dak To (ZB 0222) not much more than 600 square kilometers can be covered adequately.

- [REDACTED]
- f) Night reconnaissance operations are not only feasible, they are essential. Air patrols, ground patrols, listening posts, and ambushes are all well within the capabilities of a cavalry organization.

The essential ingredient to successful screening operations is a backup quick-reaction force used to capitalize on targets located by the troop's scout/weapons teams from the air or its rifle squads patrolling on the ground. During November and December 1965 the 1/9 Cavalry worked out a highly satisfactory arrangement with Det C3, 5th USSF Group. At each of several selected A detachment camps, a fire-brigade CIDG company was trained by the air cavalry troop in airmobile tactics and techniques. Whenever the troop was operating in the general area of a particular CIDG camp, the selected company from that camp kept one platoon on 15-minute alert and the remainder on a 1-hour alert status, to be committed on request of the cavalry troop commander. Lift was usually provided by the UH-1D helicopters of the troop's organic rifle platoon and occasionally by a CH-47 in support of the troop. This procedure worked splendidly in every instance.

The best way for an air cavalry troop to secure itself during combat operations is to operate from a secured squadron base, with troop combat elements laagering at a different location in the tactical area every night. Laagers can be co-located with CIDG camps, ARVN bases, RF/PF installations, or established at dark out in the open in relatively inaccessible areas. Security is achieved by capitalizing on the superior mobility inherent in a helicopter-mounted force.

An imperative for air cavalry operations of the kind visualized here is the ready availability of medium helicopter (CH-47) lift to move all classes of supply (but principally Class III A) from the squadron base to troop operational locations or laagers, to evacuate downed helicopters, to provide emergency tactical lift for CIDG fire brigade forces, and to move ground cavalry elements from the squadron base where they are usually located as the base security element to a selected area where their firepower is needed.

If it is intended to get the maximum use from deployed air cavalry troops on a border screening mission, uninterrupted communications are essential. This means the immediate availability of a radio relay aircraft whenever it becomes apparent that organic communications will not suffice.

Finally, a separate air cavalry squadron requires a greater aircraft maintenance capability than does a divisional squadron which is backed up by the division's aircraft maintenance and supply battalion.

5. (C) SURVEY

During January 1966, two experienced air cavalry officers, Col J. B. Stockton, formerly CO, 1/9 Cavalry Squadron and Major S. G. Beardsley, formerly CO, A Troop, 1/9 Cavalry Squadron, conducted a survey of the western border of South Vietnam from Ha Tien to the Chu Pong Mountain (YV 9090). These officers were already familiar with the border area north of the Chu Pong to the I-II Corps boundary, having operated there extensively in November and December 1965. In addition to refreshing their recollections of the terrain (both officers had served tours in Vietnam) they visited all USSF/CIDG B and C detachments in the area as well as a representative fraction of A detachments, district advisors, and ARVN division advisors. It is based on this survey, reinforced by their previous experience, that the required number of air cavalry troops to accomplish the intended mission is derived in the following section of this report. Col Stockton and Major Beardsley made several observations bearing on the problem at hand which are worth citing here:

- a) From Ha Tien on the south to the II-III Corps boundary in the vicinity of YU 5060, USSF/CIDG camps are located to permit the type of combined operations envisioned.
- b) From the II-III Corps boundary to Camp Duc Co (YA 8124) the only ground elements on or near the border are a handful of Regional Force companies in the western reaches of Quang Duc Province. The border is completely open from Duc Lap (YU 8677) to Duc Co, a distance of well over 100 kilometers.
- c) The common procedure for extending the present screening capability of USSF/CIDG A detachments, where these camps exist, is to use USAF forward air controllers and Army aviators in O-1 reconnaissance airplanes in the visual reconnaissance role. This technique has proved reasonably effective considering the limitations of the equipment being used. The USAF pilots and Army aviators observed were capable, effective, and motivated.
- d) As a general rule, USSF B detachments seem to have the most up-to-date and accurate appreciation of the PAVN/VC situation along the entirety of the border, with the exception of the II Corps area.
- e) The terrain along the entire border is susceptible to productive air cavalry reconnaissance and screening techniques, with only two or three rather small areas classified as difficult.

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6. (C) FINDINGS

a. Progressing from the easiest to the most difficult solution, and retaining as a precept the present corps boundaries, air cavalry is most profitably usable in the border screening role as follows:

- 1) IV Corps: A squadron (-) base located at Long Xuyen (WS 4848), with one troop covering the border from Ha Tien to the vicinity of Chau Phu (WS 1483) - Tan Chau (WS 2694) and a second troop extending the screen from that point to the Corps boundary.
- 2) III Corps: A squadron of three air cavalry troops with the squadron (-) based at Tay Ninh, and one troop detached to Song Be (YU 1810). One troop's area can extend from the I-II Corps boundary to the point at which the Van Dong River crosses the border at WT 9762, a second troop from that point to include the operational area of the Minh Thanh A Detachment camp (XT 6367), and the troop based at Song Be can screen from there to the II-III Corps boundary.
- 3) In II Corps, four troops are required, one each in Quang Duc, Darlac, Pleiku and Kontum Provinces. The squadron (+) base could locate at Pleiku with a supplementary base at Ban Me Thuct, or vice versa.

b. Specifically, 9 air cavalry troops are required to do the job.

c. The most urgent requirement for air cavalry is along the III Corps border in the Tay Ninh area and northeast thereof.

d. Some action is required to fill the void in ARVN ground elements along the II Corps border south of Duc Co.

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